

When William Clark arrived at the Sandy River Delta over two hundred years ago, he complained that sleep was impossible in the midst of the incessant, “horrid” clamor of so many wild birds. Maya Lin, the internationally famous artist, sought to bring Clark’s memories back to life for the public with a bird watching platform. Camouflaged upright slats bear the names of the 134 species of plants and animals that the original explorers encountered on their adventure to the vast shining Pacific Ocean. Each name is accompanied by its present status: thriving, threatened, endangered, or extinct. Unfortunately, too few are “thriving.”

The ground that I helped landscape at the Confluence Project along with four hundred other volunteers was very different from what the explorers saw two centuries ago. They saw a pristine, tumbling river lined by skyscraping trees and a cornucopia of native plants and shrubs. I, however, faintly saw a slow-moving, crippled river veiled by seven foot high blackberry bushes aggressively choking out the haggled indigenous survivors. I wondered to myself how such a drastic transformation could occur in so few years. I then spotted the fingerprints of humankind: dams, dust, and debris. A diversion dam built eighty years ago continues to prevent the Sandy River from filling except during high water. Likewise, ranchers overgrazed thousands of acres and then abandoned the downtrodden earth, leaving the rag-tag remnants of native plants prone to assault by invasive species. Although the ranchers are no longer present, their effects most certainly are. It was then that I realized the importance of my actions. How I use water now will affect generations to come.

Water is the single most important ingredient for life. It is no coincidence that water constitutes both 70% of the human body and earth’s surface. Perhaps this high water content

explains why human nature mirrors that of water. Water has mood swings as can be seen in its dipolar behavior. Water is also amphoteric, acting sour around certain people, or substances, and sweet among others. Most importantly, water density decreases as it cools, allowing life to be sustained below the surface even when ice, or difficulties, develop on the outside. In other words, water seems to care for living creatures. The mere presence of water points towards life; it is the holy grail of every scientist looking for extraterrestrial beings. Without it here, we would not be inhabiting the blue planet either.

By denying plants, animals, and most importantly humans the access to pure water, they are being robbed of life. In many third world countries, people spend the largest portion of their income for clean water. Countries, tribes, and settlers have fought for water since the beginning of time. It is our most prized resource. Even in the Pacific Northwest, where water is in abundance, we must never forget what powers our homes, what entertains us hour after hour, what sustains life, what reflects our human nature, and what very well may dictate our future.